Empowering and Engendering Hidden Histories in Caribbean Peasant Communities

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Reflecting on the United States South in the 1970s, Eugene Genovese observed that 'the history of the lower classes has yet to be written' (1971:102). In the 1980s, the anthropologist Eric Wolf wrote of *Europe and the People Without History,* arguing that '[W]e ... need to uncover the history of "the people without history"- the active histories of "primitives", peasantries, labourers, immigrants, and besieged minorities' (1982:v). Keesing likewise noted that Third World peasant communities were still being regarded as 'more or less closed and self-contained, and often as devoid of known history' (1981:423). While significant progress in these fields has since been made, academics, journalists and Native Americans all felt it necessary to point to the hidden histories of the post-Columbian Americas in the context of the 'New World' quincentenary in 1992 (e.g. Ellwood 1991; Menchú 1992; Besson 1992a, 1992b). This theme was again highlighted in 1994 by the 48th International Congress of Americanists.[1]

This neglect of 'the people without history' has perhaps been nowhere more pronounced than in the Caribbean Region, which has been variously described as the 'Third World's third world' (Naipaul 1973), the 'oldest colonial sphere' (Mintz 1971a:17), the 'gateway to Europe's New World' (Besson 1994c), and the 'core area' of African America (Mintz 1989:22). Here the Native Americans were virtually wiped out, and post-Conquest societies manufactured through European colonialism, American plantations, Euro-Asian indenture, and African slavery. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mintz highlighted the neglect, by both anthropologists and historians, of the region's history and emergent contemporary cultures (1970, 1971b, 1975, 1989). He argued that this stemmed from anthropology's traditional bias towards the study of so-called 'primitive' societies untouched by change and the fact that the post-Conquest Caribbean (forged through catastrophic change) did not fall under this rubric, and from a Eurocentric approach to the region's past. The mutual disregard of history and anthropology, as 'historians concentrated on documentary materials, an-

[1]The 48th International Congress of Americanists, held in Sweden, 4-9 July 1994, focused on the theme 'Threatened Peoples and Environments in the Americas'.

thropologists on field studies of living people' (Mintz 1975:482), was a further factor constraining Caribbean cultural history. In 1992, in the first entry on the region in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Trouillot wrote in similar vein of the Caribbean as 'An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory', identifying the continuing marginality of Caribbean anthropology, where '[F]ew dare to bring explicitly to the discipline the political or metatheoretical lessons learned on the frontier' (1992:35). In 1994, there are still few Caribbean anthropology courses in British universities.[2]

Nevertheless, anthropologists and historians, as well as specialists in Creole languages and literature, have begun to uncover the processes of adaptation and resistance by Caribbean peoples to colonialism, slavery, indenture and persisting land monopoly; processes which have included slave rebellion, marronage, and creolisation or culture-building. Within this context, however, Mintz has identified the continuing neglect of the 'reconstituted peasantries', fashioned out of earlier economic forms such as plantation labourers and rebel slaves, who 'represent a *mode of response* to the plantation system and its connotations, and a *mode of resistance* to imposed styles of life' (1989:132-33).

Mintz's own work on modes of peasantization and aspects of the peasant life-style, such as the house-yard complex, and agriculture, marketing and cuisine (e.g. 1983, 1985, 1989), has pioneered the study of Caribbean peasantries and contributed to economic anthropology and the anthropology of food. His work has generated further research and, in the second edition of *Caribbean Transformations*, he remarked that 'two scholars in particular have significantly advanced our understanding of Caribbean peasant societies in recent years' (Mintz 1989:xxvii). Here Mintz noted Trouillot's (1988) study of the Dominican banana peasantry in the world economy. The other contribution referred to was my own work on land and kinship in the 'free villages' of Trelawny Parish, Jamaica (Besson 1979, 1984a, 1984b, 1987a, 1987b). However, Mintz pointed to the need for a book-length study of one of these villages, Martha Brae, which had transformed a colonial town at the heart of plantation society. He also re-stated that: '[T]he fact is that too few observers have analyzed the [Caribbean] peasant life-style with the seriousness it deserves', and 'relatively few books and papers have dealt with the origins and history of peasant subcultures and the similarities and differences among them. Even rarer are historical studies which deal in a detailed fashion with one

[2]Exceptions to this neglect are the courses on the Caribbean Region, established and taught by the author, first at the Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and currently in the Anthropology Department at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

or another aspect of rural life in the region as a whole' (Mintz 1989:144, 230).

This paper seeks to develop these perspectives by addressing Mintz's threefold methodology for empowering the hidden histories of Caribbean peasantries, within the theoretical context of creolisation, namely: in-depth analysis of the peasant life-style, comparative study of the cultural history of peasant communities, and regional analysis of ethnographic features.[3] The discussion is divided into three main sections. The first outlines Martha Brae's two histories, which are receiving in-depth attention in a book-length study (Besson, in preparation). I briefly integrate the Euro-Caribbean history, which is the settlement's only recorded history, and outline how the Afro-Caribbean cultural history is being empowered by analysing 'the peasant life-style with the seriousness it deserves' (Mintz 1989:144).

The second section locates Martha Brae's Afro-Caribbean history and emergent culture within the comparative study of six other peasant communities in west-central Jamaica, thus analysing 'the origins and history' of seven peasant communities at the heart of the Caribbean plantation-peasant interface, 'and the similarities and differences among them' (Mintz 1989:230). Four of these communities - Granville, Refuge, Kettering and Alps - are, like post-slavery Martha Brae, the free villages in Trelawny mentioned previously, but all provide variations on the creolisation theme at the vanguard of the Caribbean post-emancipation peasant movement. The sixth community, Accompong in St. Elizabeth Parish adjoining Trelawny, is descended from rebel slaves and is the oldest post-treaty corporate Maroon society in the Americas. The seventh village is Aberdeen in St. Elizabeth, the nearest non-Maroon community to Accompong. This

[3]My usage of the concept 'peasant' draws on the work of Dalton and Mintz. Dalton (1967:265-67, 1971) defines 'peasant' as a broad middle category between the two extremes of tribal and post-peasant modern farmer, with socio-economic organisation typified by subsistence production combined with production for sale; incomplete land and labour markets (the former allowing for the existence of customary tenures, the latter for the sale of labour to augment traditional production - thus generating occupational multiplicity); the virtual absence of machine technology; and a significant retention of traditional social organisation and culture. Dalton's definition encompasses various subtypes, including the 'hybrid/composite peasantries' of Latin America and the Caribbean. Within this subtype, Caribbean 'reconstituted peasantries', originating in slavery and the plantation system (Mintz 1989:132), can be further distinguished. Mintz defines 'peasantry' in general as a class or classes of 'small-scale cultivators who own or have access to land', who produce some commodities for sale and also buy from markets, who produce much of their own subsistence, and are 'dependent in various ways upon wider political and economic spheres of control' (1989:132,141). He highlights the significance of land for both peasants in general and Caribbean peasantries.

section therefore also crosses the Maroon/non-Maroon divide to compare creolisation in African-American Maroon and non-Maroon peasant formations (cf. Besson 1994d), as called for by R.T. Smith (1975:149) in his review of Price (1973; cf. Price 1979:424).

The third section shows how empowering the hidden histories of these seven Jamaican peasant communities leads to a wider analysis of a central 'aspect of rural life in the region as a whole' (Mintz 1989:230), namely, Caribbean customary land tenures based on kinship and community. For in all these Jamaican villages, such creole tenures, which are linked with ritual and embued with oral tradition, represent repositories of hidden history and culture-building; a theme that can be widely identified in Caribbean rural communities. I synthesise and reinterpret the scattered and conflicting regional literature, in the light of my research in Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean, and address the gender dimension which has not received the attention it deserves. In conclusion, I briefly suggest how empowering and engendering the hidden histories of peasant communities on the Caribbean 'frontier' (Trouillot 1992:35) may have wider relevance to anthropology.

Martha Brae's Two Histories

I turn first to the case of Martha Brae's two post-Conquest histories. The received history of this Jamaican settlement under British rule is scattered in many sources, which deal both with the planter town itself and with its parishes of Old St. James and new Trelawny in Cornwall County. I draw together, in outline, this dispersed Euro-Caribbean history and then briefly reconstruct the hidden Afro-Caribbean cultural history.

Martha Brae was established in 1762 as the first colonial town in the eastern part of Old St. James (Fremmer 1968), on the site of a former Arawak settlement whose pre-Conquest history is irretrievable (Goodwin 1946:13).[4] At the time of the establishment of the town, British Jamaica, with French Saint-Domingue, was one of the world's two richest dependencies, based on its sugar-and-slave economy, and St James was producing three sevenths of Jamaica's sugar (Black 1984:19).

The town was situated on the Martha Brae River, about two miles upstream from the coast, at a point where the sugar plantations of Holland and Irving Tower adjoined. Holland was owned by Henry Cuniffe, an English planter and surveyor. Irving Tower had been established three

[4] After the Spanish Conquest of Jamaica in 1494, one of the earliest Spanish settlements in the island was also established on this site, prior to English colonisation in 1655 (Goodwin 1946:13; Fremmer 1967).

years earlier, in 1759, by the Scots planter James Irving.[5] The town was to serve as a supply point for such surrounding estates and was laid out by Cuniffe on the hilly margins of his Holland plantation. When the new parish of Trelawny (with an area of 333 square miles) was created out of eastern St. James in 1771, at the zenith of Jamaica's so-called 'Golden Age', Martha Brae became Trelawny's first capital and Henry Cuniffe its first Custos (Ogilvie 1954:2-7; Fremmer 1968).

At the time of its creation, Trelawny Parish contained 'about half the population, but much less than half the sugar production' of Old St. James (Jacobs 1970:14). However, Trelawny soon developed to become the centre of the island's sugar economy, with more plantations and slaves than any other parish in Jamaica (Ogilvie 1954:150; Fremmer 1970; Craton 1978:37-38). For the first twenty years of Trelawny's 'Golden Age', Martha Brae was the centre of parochial government and social life, and the hub of the parish's plantocracy, most of whom had a town house in Martha Brae. By 1790 Martha Brae was a flourishing Georgian town, with a Court, Vestry and Militia, and ships bound for Bristol and Liverpool, England, loaded Trelawny's sugar from Martha Brae (Fremmer 1967, 1968; Jacobs 1970:14).

Despite this initial prosperity, dissatisfaction with Martha Brae as Trelawny's capital was present almost from its inception. By around 1800, Martha Brae became eclipsed by the new coastal port of Falmouth, founded on one of the estates of the Barrett planter dynasty of Jamaica's North Coast and London's Wimpole Street. By the early nineteenth century Martha Brae had become a ghost town (Ogilvie 1954:6, 32-35; Fremmer 1967, 1968; Jacobs 1970; Black 1979).

Martha Brae's recorded history focuses on the splendour of the colonial planter town and dismisses contemporary Martha Brae as 'a mere scatter of houses' (Wright and White 1969:46; Black 1979; cf. Fremmer 1968; Sherlock 1984:119). However, my fieldwork revealed that Martha Brae is now a peasant community of some 800 persons, in 170 households, descended from former slaves. Historical research further showed that by 1839, one year after emancipation, the ghost-town had been taken over by ex-slave squatters from Holland and Irving Tower plantations. The Trelawny Vestry retrieved the 'captured land', which was then purchased by the Baptist Church in the 1840s and resold to ex-slaves (Ogilvie 1954:24-25; Fremmer 1968; Besson 1987b:114-15).

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[5]Island Record Office, Jamaica, Grantors Old Series 4, Lib. 165, f.11. By 1767 the English-Creole planter John Tharp (1736-1804) had established his consolidated plantations centred at Good Hope, five miles inland from Martha Brae. Tharp, who initially shipped his sugar from Martha Brae, would make one of the largest fortunes from sugar in the British West Indies (Tenison 1971; Craton 1975:254 n15).

Martha Brae's Afro-Caribbean history can therefore be seen to originate in the exodus of many freed slaves from the British West Indian plantations after emancipation in 1834-38, and in the nonconformist church-founded village system. These developments were most pronounced in the island of Jamaica and the parish of Trelawny (Paget 1964; Mintz 1989:157-79; Hall 1978; Besson 1984b, 1992c). In the Caribbean plantation heartlands of Trelawny, the flight from the estates and the church-founded village movement were rooted in traditions of slave resistance and nonconformist anti-slavery struggle; in the alliance between Baptist missionaries and slaves; and in draconian post-emancipation planter policies.[6] I will outline these origins of Martha Brae's 'new' history and then show how they generated the cultural history of the 'reconstituted' peasant community.

The Baptist missionary William Knibb, who led the nonconformist anti-slavery struggle and the Jamaican Baptist free village movement, was stationed at Falmouth in Trelawny. Slave resistance in Trelawny included marronage, rebellion and a pronounced 'proto-peasant' adaptation (Mintz 1989:152) among plantation slaves. Runaway slaves joined the Leeward Maroons in the Cockpit Country Mountains straddling Trelawny, St. Elizabeth and St. James. Trelawny slaves also participated in the 1831 slave rebellion in western Jamaica that catalysed the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.

The chattel slaves who remained on Trelawny's plantations also resisted, but in more subtle ways, asserting their humanity and establishing some autonomy by creating pronounced proto-peasant economies and communities. Estate owners allocated hilly and mountainous plantation backlands to their slaves for provision grounds to enable cheap subsistence, due to the high cost of importing food. The slaves developed domestic economies (based on these backlands and slave village yards) well beyond the planters' rationale, producing surpluses for sale, for example at the Falmouth market established in the late eighteenth century. At the zenith of plantation slavery, Jamaican slaves, including those of Trelawny, controlled one fifth of the island's currency through such marketing activities (Mintz 1989:180-213).

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[6]Some scholars (e.g. Hall 1978) have argued that the flight of freed slaves from the British Caribbean plantations was due to post-slavery planter attitudes, policies and legislation restricting the ex-slaves' use of estate houses, gardens and provision grounds in order to keep the freed slaves as a dependent labour force tied to the plantations. Others (e.g. Mintz 1989) have interpreted the exodus as a continuation of a tradition of slave resistance and the hunger of the former slaves for land of their own. For a fuller review and resolution of the debate see Besson 1992c.

A customary cognatic (i.e. nonunilineal) system of descent, burial, and land transmission, incorporating both men and women and their male and female descendants, was also created by these legally landless, kinless slaves (Besson 1992c:189-90, 1994c, 1994d). As early as 1793, Bryan Edwards noted a system of customary inheritance among the Jamaican slaves, including the transmission of land rights; in the early nineteenth century Stewart observed that each slave had such rights to land (Edwards 1793, 2:133, and Stewart 1823:267, quoted in Mintz 1989:187, 207). This gender equality among male and female slaves, who were 'equal under the whip' (L. Mathurin 1975:4), provided the foundation for the system of cognatic descent and land transmission, rooted in the transformation of privileges to customary rights (cf. Gaspar 1992:135), especially given the significance of women as field slaves and the matrilateral emphasis in slave yards and communities.[7]

A creole Myal cosmology with elaborate mortuary ritual, reflecting the perception of an active spirit world including ancestral kin, reinforced this customary system with its descent-based burial pattern and further elaborated culture-building in Jamaican slave communities. This was especially so in Trelawny, which was the centre of the island's Myal movement (Schuler 1980). With Baptist missionising in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Native Baptist Christianity, controlled by Myalism, nurtured the 1831 slave rebellion.

After emancipation from 1834-38, planter attitudes were draconian, particularly in Trelawny where the plantation economy continued to expand well beyond the abolition of slavery (Paget 1964:42; Jacobs 1970:16). Trelawny planter policies included notices to the freed slaves to quit plantation lands, and the sale of estate backlands used as provision grounds, in an attempt to destroy the production of the former proto-peasants and create a landless rural proletariat dependent on low-waged labour on the estates. These policies, reinforced by island-wide legislation such as the ejectment and trespass acts, however backfired in Trelawny and throughout Jamaica, as ex-slaves left the plantations wherever possible to acquire land through squatting, rental or purchase.

Post-slavery peasant settlement was however severely constrained, as there was a virtual veto by planters on selling land to former slaves. In this context, the Baptist Church played a major role in facilitating the establishment of peasant communities (which also served as captive

[7]Stewart's wording focuses on male slaves. However, despite this gender bias, his statement that 'each slave' had customary land rights indicates full female, as well as male, participation in this customary system (Besson 1994d). For evidence of similar customary land rights among both female and male slaves throughout the Caribbean region see note 27 below.

congregations), by buying and subdividing land for resale to the ex-slaves. Such land settlements were especially prominent in Trelawny, under the sponsorship of Knibb, and by 1845 the parish had 23 free villages (Paget 1964:51; Besson 1984b). The ex-slaves' plots of land were, however, small, often providing only a house-spot and a bargaining position for wages while continuing to work on the plantations.

Within this context, the ex-slave settlers of Martha Brae created inalienable 'family land' in order to transmit scarce freehold rights to all descendants in perpetuity, regardless of gender, birth order, residence or legitimacy. This creole institution,[8] which maximised land rights and kinship lines among the descendants of legally landless and kinless chattel slaves, transformed West and Central African unilineal landholding, and British West Indian primogeniture, through a creolisation process par-

[8] I use this concept in the sense that it is widely used in the social sciences, namely, to refer to 'forms of standardised action or behaviour linked to a set of complex and interdependent norms and roles and applying to a relatively large proportion of persons within a society or territory' (Seymour-Smith 1986:153). My usage is also consistent with that of Mintz and Price, who define 'institution' (in the context of Caribbean culture-building) 'as any regular or orderly social interaction that acquires a normative character, and can hence be employed to meet recurrent needs. Thus broadly defined, a particular form of marriage, a particular religious cult, a particular pattern for establishing friendships, a particular economic relationship that is normative and recurrent - all would be examples of institutions' (1992:23). Carnegie (1987) mistakenly assumed that my usage of 'institution' supported M.G. Smith's (1965) plural society theory and Clarke's (1953) conflict approach to land tenure - despite my own critique of these perspectives (predating and extending Carnegie's analysis), which shows the complex ways in which family land articulates with other small-scale tenures and with the legal code (Besson 1974, Chapters 4 and 7, 1984a:76 n7, 1987a:38 n3, 1987b, 1988). Espeut (1992) and Crichlow (1994) unquestioningly follow Carnegie's assumption, and compound this by a selective consideration of our dialogue. Crichlow (p. 93) further adds to the confusion by labeling M.G. Smith, Clarke and myself as sharing an 'institutional-structural approach' - although I use both social structural and social organisational perspectives (cf. Trouillot 1989:324). The fact that 'institution' is also used in functionalist theory (which M.G. Smith vigorously opposed), where 'the concept of institution is linked to that of human needs' (Seymour-Smith 1986:153), underlines the error of Carnegie's assumption. (This should not be taken to mean that I support the functionalist school; see e.g. Besson 1993, where I set aside the pluralist-functionalist debate). My point is further underlined by Trouillot's perceptive observation (1989:324), in his review of the Carnegie-Besson 'debate' instigated by Carnegie (1987), that '[T]he problem is in part terminological: what constitutes an institution?' Trouillot rightly suggests that both myself and Carnegie are "trying to perfect what I would call a 'historical-processual'" model (though I am not sure we need one more label), along the lines established by Mintz' (ibid.; cf. Besson 1987b, in which I attempted to defuse the 'debate'). Moreover, as Carnegie, Espeut and Crichlow all use the concept of 'family land', they are also using an institutional approach.

alleling the transformation of the planter town. The unrestricted family land system consolidated the cognatic system of descent and land transmission created by the proto-peasant slaves (Besson 1984a:58-60, 1987b:103-4, 1992c:199-200).[9]

In the twentieth century, Trelawny's plantation economy was consolidated and transformed through corporate capitalism. The parish's fertile land is now engrossed by two sugar-cane *centrals* and several *properties* or large farms, replacing the former 100 slave estates. With this continuing land monopoly, the Old Families of Martha Brae continue to pass on miniscule family land estates, measured in square chains and reinforced by oral tradition. This oral tradition, currently transmitted by elderly grandchildren and great-grandchildren of ex-slaves, provided further insight into: the flight from the estates; the transformation of the colonial town; the role of the Baptist Church in land purchase; the ex-slaves' creation of family land; the retention of family land by contemporary villagers; and the role of oral history for people without written history. In addition, the Jamaican Creole language of this oral tradition further reflects the culture-building of the slaves and their descendants. Selected

[9] A contrast with legal freeholds in Jamaica highlights the features of family land. Legal freeholds, introduced to Jamaica by colonial rule, often comprise extensive tracts of land. Legal freeholds are private property, alienable, marketable in the capitalist economy, validated by legal documents, and acquired through purchase, deed of gift, or testate inheritance. As elsewhere in the British Caribbean, intestacy was traditionally defined on the basis of legitimacy, male precedence, primogeniture, and legal marriage. Houses on legal freehold land are part of the real estate, and land use is governed by the capitalist values of maximising profits and production. The customary family land system differs in all respects. Generally small in size (often only a few square chains), family land should not be sold and is regarded as the inalienable corporate estate of the family line. Rights to family land are essentially validated through oral tradition and, while initially acquired through purchase, are customarily transmitted through intestacy. Such intestate inheritance is based on unrestricted cognatic descent, whereby all children and their descendants are considered co-heirs regardless of gender, birth order, residence or legitimacy; marriage is not regarded as a basis for inheritance. Houses are distinguished from family land and considered movable property, and may be either individually or jointly owned. The use of family land is not governed by the values of capitalist monoculture but by a complex of economic and symbolic values forged among the peasantry and proto-peasantry. Family land is the spatial dimension of the family line, reflecting its continuity and identity, and provides inalienable freehold rights, house-sites, a spot for a kitchen garden, a place for absentees to return to in time of need and, where land availability and state regulations allow, a family burial ground. In addition to anthropological analysis, this customary kin-based tenure is identified among the peasantry by their own concept of 'family land' (Besson 1987b:118, 1988:44). This is not to say (with reference to the Carnegie-Espeut-Crichlow triad) that either the peasantry or myself are unaware that family land co-exists with other small-scale tenures and interacts with the legal code (see note 8 above).

extracts from the oral account of Mr. T. (born around 1903), the grandson of emancipated slaves from Irving Tower plantation and an 'older head' of one of Martha Brae's Old Families, illustrates these themes:

> 'All the districts [villages] generally in Jamaica, they are excerpts from slavery; handing down from slavery. The slaves were here working on the farms [plantations], and when they get freedom, you see, you have little districts here, districts there: Granville, Martha Brae, Bounty Hall, Rock, Perth Town, Daniel Town [free villages in Trelawny]. So you have all the little districts around [and] those older slaves go there and they produce children ...
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> Well, you see, [in the case of] Martha Brae, the slaves were occupying over Irving Tower. That's the property over there, Irving Tower. Well, when they get their freedom now, they launch from out there to Martha Brae. So, if you notice it now, some of the people here in Martha Brae, is acquire them acquire [inherited land] from those who first got it ...
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> Most of the history of the Black people don't come in big logbook. They keep it themselves, and grandparents told their children and grandchildren. And my grandparents told me that the Martha Brae lands were acquired by the Church. The Baptists got the land and then dispatched it to their members. And this also happened in Martha Brae. And there was a school and prayer house. Many of the children here went to school there, and Sunday school also.
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> Well, my [paternal] grandfather was in the slave days. Him was an old man before him die, but him touch a little of the slavery. Because he said he was over Irving Tower there, that him used to live there when him get the place [land] to buy out here [in Martha Brae]. He bought it, you see, after abolition of slavery – Apprenticeship. There was an apprenticeship for the slaves. So they get allotted lands for them. That's why you find these little districts all over Jamaica.
>
> Well, my grandfather he bought the piece of land that I am living on now ... Well, my grandfather said the land should not be sold. It is for his heritage going down. It must go from children to grandchildren, right down the line...
>
> It is such a state now, that the district [Martha Brae] is surrounded by the properties still. So when the property want workers, they just notify the district and the workers come. The majority of the [provision] grounds that you have now, the land belong to the properties still ...

> Many people here don't have a square of land. Lack of land space – the people is like you put a pig in a kraal. That's just how plenty a the poor people live. Just like a pig in a kraal.'

After the death of Mr. T.'s generation, the family land estate was transmitted to the fourth and fifth descending generations of the emancipated slave.

Based on a combination of such oral tradition with historical research and long-term anthropological fieldwork, Martha Brae's Afro-Caribbean cultural history documents the evolution of the peasant economy and community, maintained on some 50 acres of marginal land hemmed in by plantations. The themes of family lines and family estates form the central threads of this 'new' history. The family land system articulates with other small-scale tenures (e.g. 'bought land', 'rent land', 'free land', 'captured land' and 'landless farms') and with the Jamaican legal code, thus challenging M.G. Smith's 'plural society' model of Caribbean land tenure systems (M.G. Smith 1965; Besson 1974: Chapters 4 and 7, 1984a:58, 76 n7, 1987a:38 n3, 1987b, 1988:42).[10] Villagers continue to create new family land whenever possible, but land acquisition remains severely constrained and increasing land scarcity has spawned the satellite squatter settlement of 'Zion' on government-owned land outside Martha Brae. Martha Brae's multiple land tenure complex is linked to a tripartite pattern of land use on house-yard, provision-ground and 'mountain', originating in plantation slavery and perpetuated by land monopoly (Mintz 1989:180-213, 225-50; Higman 1988:261-76).[11] Crops are produced for subsistence, for peasant marketing in Falmouth, and for the world economy. The Trelawny peasantry has also expanded the Falmouth market through informal import higglering, from elsewhere in the region and from the mainland Americas. Occupational multiplicity, incorporating wage-labour, tourism and migration, further elaborates and differentiates Martha Brae's peasant economy. A Friendly Society provides mutual aid for sickness and burial, and integrates the community with other villages in the parish and the island through a network of reciprocity.

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[10]Cf. notes 8 and 9 above.

[11]In addition to the dichotomy between Caribbean house-yard and provision-ground established by Mintz, originating in the villages and hilly backlands of slave plantations, Higman identifies eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaican food production as having taken place on 'separate units of land called mountains', further into the mountainous interior (1988:261). He states that this 'system of separated "mountain" ' provision-grounds was particularly common in the western parishes' including Trelawny, and further notes that in this sugarcane-dominated parish such provision-grounds could be as distant as twenty miles from the yard (ibid.:265, 266).

While the Martha Brae villagers are still Baptist in formal faith, the Baptist Church co-exists with Revival-Zion cosmology, which evolved in the post-emancipation period from Native Baptist Christianity. The Revival world view, which continues to perceive links between the living and an active spirit-world, including ancestral kin, is institutionalised in Revival churches. Revival is reflected in family land transmission and elaborate mortuary ritual placing the dead in the village cemetery, which has replaced the yard burial pattern of the proto-peasantry and the immediate post-emancipation period. The Rastafarian movement, rooted in an Ethiopian ideology which developed on the slave plantations, and catalysed in the twentieth century by Garveyism in Jamaica and the crowning of Ras Tafari in Ethiopia, further elaborates the creole religious scene (Besson 1994a).

Creolisation is also manifested in consanguinity and affinity. Bilateral kinship networks and a dynamic 'complex' conjugal system, based on exogamous serial polygamy, interrelate with the unrestricted cognatic descent and landholding corporations. These overlapping corporations integrate the community with other Trelawny villages, and enable national and international circulatory migration. Conjugality and bilateral kinship likewise extend beyond the village. The kinship and marriage system maximises all relations of kinship, descent, conjugality and affinity as dimensions of community and bases of identity. This creole system is reflected in a Hawaiianised Eskimo kinship terminology, further modified by the differentiation of siblings and half-siblings.[12] Martha Brae's post-slavery cultural history therefore reflects the transformation not only of the institutions of the European planter class, but also of ancestral African societies and imposed colonial nonconformist Baptist styles of life.

The Peasant Communities of West-Central Jamaica

Martha Brae's post-slavery development is part of the wider cultural history of the Jamaican peasantry, especially the peasant communities elsewhere in Trelawny and the adjoining parish of St. Elizabeth; areas of plantation consolidation and reactive peasantisation. The evolution of these communities remains largely unrecorded, as in the case of post-emancipation Martha Brae. This second section outlines 'the origins and history' of six other peasant communities in west-central Jamaica and 'the similarities and differences among them' (Mintz 1989:230). As with post-slavery Martha Brae, these hidden histories have been uncovered through a combination of historical research, anthropological fieldwork and the vil-

[12]For a fuller discussion of this kinship terminology see Besson 1994d.

lagers' oral traditions. These oral histories, like those of Martha Brae, reach back to the post-emancipation period and in some cases well beyond: to the slavery past, to the 'First-Time Maroons', to the Middle Passage of the Atlantic slave trade, and to the 'ship-mate' fictive kinship bond which formed the atom of African-American slave society (Mintz and Price 1992:43; Besson 1994d).

Granville.

Comparative research was first extended to Granville, just one mile southwest of Martha Brae (Besson 1984b:10-13). Granville's peasant economy and society are similar to those of Martha Brae (and of the other Trelawny villages), and the inhabitants of Martha Brae and Granville are closely linked by kinship and affinity. Historical sources, such as Baptist records, provided a base-line for reconstructing Granville's cultural history. The community was founded as a free village in 1845 by the Baptist missionary William Knibb, who named the settlement after the English abolitionist Granville Sharpe. The village was established on about 90 acres of mountainous land (a former livestock pen) to absorb ex-slaves, in the flight from the estates, from the nearby plantations of Green Park, Merrywood and Maxfield, as well as from Holland estate bordering Martha Brae; and 'in order that a portion of the people might be near enough to ensure a good congregation at the parent chapel' in Falmouth (Underhill 1862:370). The establishment of Granville, through a Baptist freehold land settlement, was therefore more clear-cut than post-slavery Martha Brae, which initially evolved through squatting on the site of the former colonial town.

Fieldwork in Granville identified a population of around 600 persons, in 120 households, precariously established on small plots of land, each only a few square chains in size. As in Martha Brae, the core of this population are Old Families descended from ex-slave settlers of the free village and transmitting family land. These unrestricted landholding corporations overlap both within the village and with Old Families in Martha Brae. Settlement in Granville is, however, more dispersed than in Martha Brae, which retains the urban layout of the colonial town; and while Martha Brae now has a cemetery, Granville still buries in the yard, as was the custom in Martha Brae in the immediate aftermath of emancipation. Granville's landscape is therefore charted by graves and tombs of varying style and age, reflecting continuity and change within the village and embedding its kinship lines.

Oral tradition embroiders these themes in Granville's hidden history. Villagers tell of the establishment of Granville by William Knibb, and some oral histories are reinforced by an original land deed from Knibb. Oral tradition details the subdivision of the Granville lands by Knibb's

'land butcher' or surveyor, a mulatto and probably a Baptist class leader, whose descendants (some of whom are migrants in England) have the most extensive and fertile landholdings in contemporary Granville. Villagers say that the settlement was originally known as 'Grumble Pen', due to disputes in the post-slavery struggle for land. This claim assumed added significance in the light of the dual naming pattern that I subsequently identified in some other Trelawny villages, and which was found by Mintz in the Baptist free village of Sturge Town/Birmingham in the neighbouring parish of St. Ann (Mintz 1989:160-62, 168; Besson 1984b). Villagers also recounted overlapping histories of the Old Families and their family land. These histories included accounts of emancipation celebrations by the freed slaves and the words of their 'freedom songs'.

Refuge.

Historical research also uncovered the origin of Refuge, seven miles east of Martha Brae (Besson 1984b:13-15). Like Granville, Refuge was a free village established by William Knibb on about 90 acres of hilly land. Knibb's speech to the Baptist Missionary Society in England in 1842 outlined the founding of the village, with a chapel and a school. The church's cornerstone bears the date 1838, the year of full emancipation. Refuge was originally named Wilberforce after the abolitionist, and for its first four years the village had the two names Wilberforce-Refuge, like Granville-Grumble Pen. In Refuge, however, the colloquial name took hold by 1842, underlining the village's role as a refuge for ex-slaves in the flight from nearby sugar estates such as Oxford, Etingdon and Stewart Castle. Oxford plantation, which was owned by the English Barrett family during slavery, still encompasses Refuge. In the mid-twentieth century Oxford was incorporated into the Trelawny Estates central controlled by Seagram's, the world's largest alcohol multi-national. In the 1970s, this central was nationalised and, as National Sugar (Long Pond), now manufactures Jamaican 'Gold Label' rum. Fieldwork identified a population of over 400 persons in Refuge, in 80 households, many of whom are descended from the ex-slave settlers as in Martha Brae and Granville. As in those two villages, overlapping cognatic corporations transmit family land created by ex-slaves. Dispersed settlement and yard burial patterns more closely resemble Granville than Martha Brae. Oral tradition in Refuge reaches further back than in those two communities: beyond the post-emancipation era to the daily suffering of slavery, and to the Atlantic slave-trade and the shipmate bond.

Kettering.

Kettering village is three miles further east than Refuge and adjoins the town of Duncans (Besson 1984b:15-16). Like Granville and Refuge, Ket-

tering was founded as a Baptist free village by William Knibb. The settlement was established in 1841, on the hilly land of a former pimento estate, and was named after Knibb's Northhamptonshire home-town. Knibb himself resided there, where Baptist ex-slaves built him a home. Historical records show that the subdivided land was sold to former slaves, from plantations such as Braco, and that 278 persons settled in 80 households. Kettering's contemporary population has grown to about 800 persons, roughly equivalent to Martha Brae's population but on a more dispersed land base.[13] As in the previous three villages, genealogies showed that the Kettering villagers are mainly descended from freed slaves who created and transmitted family land. Like Refuge, oral tradition reaches beyond the post-emancipation era to the slavery past: for example, to an ancestress slave-child in a plantation 'hogmeat gang'.[14] Burial patterns in Kettering vary yet again. The more rural half of Kettering still buries in the yard; while the more urban half of the village is now required, by urban planning, to inter in the Duncans cemetery.

Alps.

The fifth Trelawny village studied was Alps, whose location differs from that of the previous four communities (Besson 1984b:17-18). While the other four villages are on the hilly margins of the coastal plantations, Alps is further inland in the northern foothills of the Cockpit Country Mountains. My archival research established that Alps was Trelawny's first free village, originally named New Birmingham. This village, established like Refuge in the year of full emancipation, 1838, was (with Sligoville in St. Catherine Parish) one of Jamaica's first two Baptist villages; and, with Sligoville, provided the model for the island's free village system. New Birmingham was founded by the Baptist missionary Benjamin Dexter, under the sponsorship of Knibb, on a former coffee estate, The Alps, and named after the abolitionist Joseph Sturge's Birmingham home-town. Like Granville-Grumble Pen and Wilberforce-Refuge in Trelawny, and Sturge Town-Birmingham in St. Ann, New Birmingham-Alps had two names; and, as in the case of Refuge, the colloquial name took hold.

Interviews uncovered overlapping corporations in Alps descended from ex-slaves and transmitting family land, as in the other Trelawny vil-

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[13]My research in Kettering focused on approximately half the population - about 400 persons in some 80 households.

[14]As Patterson (1967:59) has noted, field slaves on Jamaican plantations were divided into at least three gangs, with four gangs on very large plantations such as Green Park in Trelawny. The third or fourth gang was the hogmeat gang, comprised of children between the ages of around four years and ten years, whose minor tasks included 'collecting food for the hogs'.

lages; and Alps has the most pronounced and elaborate family land burial grounds of these communities. One such family cemetery contained 34 cairns and tombs dating back to the early post-emancipation era, which oral tradition contrasts with the unmarked graves of 150 'invisible' slave ancestors in the former plantation 'cholera ground'.

Accompong.

Beyond Trelawny's border, in the precipitous forested southern reaches of the Cockpit Country Mountains in St. Elizabeth, is the Maroon community of Accompong descended from rebel slaves. Accompong is the only surviving village of the Jamaican Leeward Maroon polity and is the oldest persisting post-treaty corporate Maroon community in the Americas. The village was consolidated over two hundred and fifty years ago, after Jamaica's First Maroon War (1725-39), by a treaty between Colonel Cudjoe, the Leeward Maroon leader, and the British colonial government, forced to sue for peace. This treaty of March 1739 included the Maroons of Trelawny Town, who were subsequently betrayed and deported by the colonial regime after the Second Maroon War of 1795-96. The Leeward treaty predates the June 1739 treaty of the Windward Maroons of eastern Jamaica, and the treaties between the Suriname Maroons and the Dutch in the 1760s.

Aspects of Leeward and Windward Maroon history have been recorded from a Eurocentric viewpoint, insofar as they impinge on British colonial history (cf. Bilby 1984b:9-21). Dimensions of Jamaican Maroon social and cultural history have also been uncovered from an African-American Maroon perspective. Campbell (1990) has documented 'a history of resistance, collaboration and betrayal' among the Jamaican Maroons up to the Second Maroon War; while Kopytoff (1976a, 1976b, 1978, 1979, 1987) has reconstructed Jamaican Maroon ethnohistory up to the 1970s. Bilby (1981, 1984a, 1984b) has analysed ritual, identity, and oral history among the Windward Maroons, and Zips (e.g. 1993) has studied religion and resistance in Accompong.[15] However, as Palmié has noted, 'the evolution of the Jamaican Maroon kinship system has, unfortunately, not received sufficient attention' (1992:15 n11). This neglect has been especially marked regarding the relationship between kinship, community and land.

My own recent research in Accompong has focused on land, kinship and community, and has been essentially comparative across the Maroon/non-

[15]In addition, Barker and Spence (1988) have undertaken a geographical study of Accompong Maroon agriculture and Chris de Beet is studying the demography of Accompong.

Maroon divide.[16] In three earlier papers I have explored in greater detail Maroon and non-Maroon resistance and identity in the peasant communities of west-central Jamaica, the comparative creolisation of slave kinship in these communities, and Accompong's sacred landscape as a variant on wider Caribbean themes (Besson 1994b, 1994d, 1994f). Here I outline 'the similarities and differences' (Mintz 1989:230) between Accompong and the non-Maroon communities. In the Trelawny villages, as noted earlier, the core of land is held by Old Families as family land, created by emancipated slaves in Baptist-founded settlements; and such family land interrelates with other small-scale tenures and with the Jamaican legal code (cf. Besson 1974, 1984a, 1987b, 1988). The Accompong Maroons, by contrast, hold 1,500 acres of common land, in a precipitous mountain reservation, granted by the treaty of March 1739. However, since the Maroons' Allotment Act of 1842, four years after emancipation, the colonial government, and subsequently the Jamaican state, has attempted to deprive the Maroons of their status and common land. The firmest resistance to these attempts has come from Accompong, and Kopytoff (1979) has documented border and tax disputes up to the 1970s. Such disputes continued throughout my fieldwork up to 1994.

In the face of these external pressures to undermine the commons, the Accompong Maroons have created creole land tenure and kinship systems which are still evolving. Common land remains the central basis of Maroon economy, society and corporate identity. This identity has, however, been reinforced by overlapping cognatic family lines, similar in some respects to the Trelawny Old Families, but claiming descent from the First-Time Maroons who won the war and established the Accompong community.[17] Bilateral kinship networks further link these family lines, as in Trelawny, but Accompong's corporate community is additionally strengthened by tendencies towards Maroon endogamy and cousin conjugality. This kinship and marriage system is reflected in the Maroon sayings 'We are all one family' and 'We are Royal Family', and is symbolised in the sacred Kindah Tree with its sign proclaiming 'We are Family'. This tree is the central symbol of the annual Myal ritual, handed down over more than two hundred and fifty years from the rebel

[16]My research in Accompong has also been diachronic in that it was based on recurrent fieldwork over the fourteen-year period 1979-93, with visits in 1979, 1989, 1991 and 1993. This enabled me to identify the emerging pattern of yard burial discussed at a later point in this article.

[17]As Kopytoff (1979:52) has noted, 'When Maroons today speak of the "First-Time Maroons", they mean not the first escapees from the plantations, but the people who won them the treaties, some eighty years after the Maroons had begun to collect in the interior of Jamaica'.

plantation slaves, despite the Scottish Presbyterian Church established in Accompong in the late nineteenth century.

Around the Kindah Tree are ancestral burial grounds marked by cairns and boulders. Oral history states that these are the graves of First-Time Coromantee and 'Congo' Maroons and their immediate descendants. Oral tradition is underwritten by ethnohistorical evidence of such African ethnicity in early Jamaican Maroon society.[18] Accompong's African ancestral burial grounds have, however, long been complemented by the Presbyterian Church cemetery, which has become a symbol of the corporate creole community.

Within this wider context of corporate identity and common land, cognatic landholding corporations, with similarities to those of the Trelawny villages, are emerging. For while common rights still typify the outer forest zone, usufructory rights to provision grounds in the intermediate zone, and to house-yards in the inner residential area, are being transmitted through cognation. This process of descent-based incorporation of portions of Maroon land is being reinforced by an emergent pattern of yard burial. While this interment custom has long typified some Trelawny villages, it runs counter to Maroon tradition. This is underlined by the indignation yard burial has aroused among conventional Maroons.

Yet, paradoxically, this new interment pattern is an aspect of the creolisation process which has enabled the Accompong community to survive. A creolisation strategy was endorsed by the Leeward Maroon leader Colonel Cudjoe, who was a Creole Maroon, and who stipulated that his followers should speak Jamaican Creole English rather than the languages of Africa (Kopytoff 1976b:42, 45). From this perspective, the evolving landholding corporations and yard burial can be seen as further adaptations to preserve the Maroon community, against increasing external pressure, by embedding its kinship lines.

Accompong's corporate identity is also paradoxically maintained through relations beyond the Maroon community, especially with the nearest non-Maroon village, Aberdeen in St. Elizabeth, the seventh community studied.

Aberdeen.

Aberdeen village, which now comprises two sections, Upper and Lower Aberdeen, is on the former Aberdeen slave plantation, founded in the

[18]Coromantees and their descendants dominated the Leeward Maroons in the eighteenth century, and 'Congo' runaways settled 'deep in the western woods' after the Leeward treaty. Colonel Cudjoe, who forged the treaty, was a Creole Maroon but had a Coromantee father. He also had a Coromantee name, as did other Leeward Maroon leaders, namely, Quaco, Cuffee and Accompong (Kopytoff 1976b:38, 40, 42).

eighteenth century by Alexander Forbes of Scotland's Aberdeen. The older section of the village, Upper Aberdeen, is in the foothills of the Aberdeen Mountains (on Accompong's southern horizon), which were the backlands of the slave plantation. Accompong's oral history tells of alliances between the First-Time Maroons and Aberdeen plantation slaves, established through the backlands of the estate. These alliances are said to have enabled the Maroons to make plantation livestock-raids.

Accompong Maroons underline their independence from the Jamaican state by repeatedly referring to the exemption of the commons from taxation, and by contrasting this with the Aberdeen villagers who have to pay tax on parcelled land. Despite this differential status and the tendency towards Maroon endogamy, Accompong is linked to Aberdeen by conjugality, bilateral kinship and affinity.

With the consolidation of the plantation system and the development of the multinational banana industry in Jamaica after emancipation (Satchell 1990), Aberdeen sugar plantation became a banana estate. Aberdeen estate has now been transformed into a government land settlement, which has enabled Aberdeen village to expand reinforcing the distinction between Upper and Lower Aberdeen. However, Aberdeen village and Accompong remain encompassed by plantations, notably by Appleton Estates, manufacturers of Appleton Jamaica Rum. In the face of this persisting land monopoly, unrestricted descent and landholding corporations have been a continuous theme in Upper Aberdeen. This parallel with the Trelawny villages is reflected in extensive family land burial grounds, as in Granville, Alps and Refuge. Aberdeen's family land system has undoubtedly contributed to the creolisation of burial patterns in Accompong. In Aberdeen itself, family land burial grounds are the central symbol of the community's cultural history.

Caribbean Customary Tenures and Hidden Histories

The two preceding sections show that the hidden histories of all seven Jamaican peasant villages are embedded in their land, the core resource of the communities and the focus of their oral traditions. Similar customary tenures, based on kinship and community, can be identified throughout the Caribbean Region, especially in the non-Hispanic territories where post-slavery peasantries emerged. This third section analyses this 'aspect of rural life in the region as a whole' (Mintz 1989:203). I first synthesise, and then reinterpret, four aspects of these tenures, namely: their

widespread occurrence, their origins, their dynamics, and their implications for development.[19] I then consider the neglected gender dimension.

With respect to the distribution of these tenures, family land has been identified in several other Jamaican rural communities and, elsewhere in the Greater Antilles, in relation to the Haitian *lakou*. In the Lesser Antilles, family land has been reported for the British and Danish/American Virgin Islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda, and St. John; the Commonwealth Leeward Islands of Nevis, Montserrat and Antigua; Dutch St. Eustatius; French Martinique; the Commonwealth Windward Islands of Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Grenada; Carriacou and Bequia, in the Grenadines; and Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Providencia.[20]

In the more northern Bahamas, a similar tenure, 'generation property', interrelates with common land. On the coastlands of the Guianas, which comprise the southern margin of the Caribbean (socio-culturally defined, Mintz 1971a, 1989), cognatic land transmission co-exists with community land in Guyana and Suriname. Among the Maroons in the interior of Suriname and French Guiana, there are kin-based tenures based on matriliny. Among the Black Caribs of the Caribbean Coast of Central America, a cognatic system co-exists with common land, as in the Carib reservations of St. Vincent and Dominica. As outlined earlier, a similar pattern is emerging among the Jamaican Accompong Maroons. In the Leeward Island of Barbuda, cognatic land transmission typifies house-yards in the island's only village, while the rest of the island is regarded

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[19]For further discussion of these issues, including the question of the African heritage, the co-existence of family land with other small-scale tenures, and the interrelation of customary and legal tenurial principles, see Besson 1974, 1979, 1984a, 1984b, 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1992c, 1994c, 1994d.

[20]Reports of family land in Jamaica and Haiti have included Clarke (1953, 1966) and Larose (1975) respectively. For the Virgin Islands, Olwig (1985) has provided rich material on St. John; Frank McGlynn has studied family land in Tortola (personal communication, 1988); and I have ascertained that this tenure exists in Virgin Gorda. For the Leewards, see Philpott (1973) and Olwig (1993) on Montserrat and Nevis; while I have identified family land in Antigua. In the Windwards and Grenadines, Van den Bor (1979:131) has reported 'succession-ground' on St. Eustatius; Horowitz (1967:29-30, 45-50) has provided evidence of family land in Martinique; as has Trouillot (1988:252) for Dominica, D.C.E. Mathurin (1967) for St. Lucia, Rubenstein (1987) for St. Vincent, Brierley (1974:90-91) for Grenada, M.G. Smith (1965) for Carriacou, and N. Price (1988:117) for Bequia. I have also identified this tenure in Dominica. Greenfield (1960) has reported family land for Barbados, Wilson (1973:53-57) for Providencia, and Littlewood (1993:177) for Trinidad, while I have found this tenure in both Trinidad and Tobago. For more extensive reviews of the sources providing evidence of family land throughout the region, see Besson 1984a:77 n16, 1987a:17, 1992c:211 n3, 1994c.

as common land. Within the Barbudan commons, rights to trees and provision grounds are based on cognation, as in Accompong.[21]

The interpretation of the origins of such customary tenures by anthropologists has been piecemeal and contentious, and has tended towards cultural survival explanations. Edith Clarke (1953, 1966), in her pioneering study, attributed Jamaican family land to the African heritage of the Ashanti slaves. Greenfield (1960) later argued that Barbadian family land derived from English entailment. In Martinique, St. Lucia, and Haiti, family land has been explained as a survival from the French Napoleonic code (Horowitz 1967:29-30; Finkel 1971:299; Mintz 1989:274); while R.T. Smith recently defended his 1950s thesis that Guyanese 'children's property' derives from Roman-Dutch colonial law (1955, 1990).[22] In the 1980s and 1990s, Africanist retention explanations have been reactivated by Carnegie (1987) and Espeut (1992) for Jamaican family land, by Barker and Spence (1988) for the Accompong Maroon commons, and by Craton (1987) for the Bahamaian case. Wilson (1973:56) argued that the Providencian system derived from Jamaica. M.G. Smith (1965) analysed family land in Carriacou as an adaptation to the island's demographic and social structure, and Berleant-Schiller (1987) contended that the Barbudan commons are unique.

The dynamics of the kin-based tenures have been analysed in an equally inconsistent and piecemeal fashion. Clarke (1953, 1966), writing two years before Goodenough's (1955) rethinking of kinship systems based on Malayo-Polynesian data, presented evidence of unrestricted cognatic descent and landholding corporations in Jamaica, but referred to these as kindreds. Solien (1959), influenced by Goodenough, argued that restricted nonunilineal descent groups typified the Black Caribs and Clarke's Jamaican data. Davenport (1961a, 1961b) described Jamaican landholding kin groups as localised joint families, but was unable to conclusively identify restricting factors (as had also been the case with Solien's reinterpretation of Clarke's data). Greenfield (1960) analysed the Barbadian system as unrestricted. Otterbein (1964), on the basis of Clarke's and Greenfield's data and his own Bahamian study, argued that land transmis-

[21]See e.g. Craton (1987) on the Bahamas, R.T. Smith (1955, 1990) on Guyana, Mintz and Price (1992:68-71) on the Para region of Suriname and the Saramaka Maroons, Bilby (1989:146) on the Aluku Maroons of French Guiana, Solien (1959) on the Black Caribs, and Gullick (1976:252) and Honychurch (1991:18-19) on the Caribs of St. Vincent and Dominica. The analysis of the Barbudan case combines data from Berleant-Schiller (e.g. 1987), Lowenthal and Clarke (e.g. 1979), and Besson (e.g. 1987a:38-40 n5); my reinterpretation being further based on a visit to Barbuda in 1993. For further discussion of these Caribbean customary tenures see Besson 1992c, 1994c, 1994d.

[22]For my reply to R.T. Smith (1990) see Besson 1994c note 4.

sion was unrestricted in the Bahamas, Barbados and post-emancipation Jamaica, but had become restricted in Jamaica due to increased land scarcity. His analysis was inconsistent, since Barbados has the region's highest population density. Olwig (1985) and R.T. Smith (1988) presented evidence of ancestor-focused unrestricted landholding corporations in St. John, Jamaica and Guyana, but analysed only ego-focused bilateral kinship systems.

Mintz and Price (1992:68-70) identified overlapping non-unilineal ancestral ritual groups among the coastal plantation slaves of Suriname but concluded that, as such non-exclusive groups could not function in relation to land, the plantation communities themselves became landholding corporations after emancipation. Yet they referred to nonunilineal landholding groups in Jamaica, but designated similar corporations in Haiti as groups of patrikin (ibid.:75). Larose (1975) later analysed the Haitian *lakou* as based on cognatic descent. M.G. Smith focused on 'patrilineal bloods' in Carriacou, but presented evidence of a cognatic system of land transmission (1962:74, 296). Apart from the so-called 'matrifocal family', Caribbean kin groups have seldom been mentioned in the wider anthropological literature. However, Murdock (1960:6) typified the Jamaican kinship system as bilateral/Eskimo, lacking descent groups; while Fox (1967:120) observed that some West Indians are patrilineal. Not surprisingly, Mintz and Price have referred to the unsolved mysteries of Caribbean kin-based land transmission systems (Mintz 1989:242; Mintz and Price 1992:75).

The perception of Caribbean customary tenures by lawyers, administrators and developers has tended to be negative. Clarke noted that family land was unrecognised by the law in Jamaica (1953:116, 1966:66). D.C.E. Mathurin described family land in St. Lucia as 'an unfavourable system of land tenure' which was 'stifling agricultural development' (1967:1, 2). Lowenthal observed that, in West Indian societies, '[L]ocal authorities condemn "family land" ' tenure as uneconomic, wasteful, a prime cause of soil exhaustion and erosion, an obstacle to agricultural modernization' (1972:104). Craton reported a tendency in the Bahamas towards the eradication of customary tenures, and a view of generation property 'as blocking development along "modern" lines' (1987:107). Espeut contended that in Jamaica 'the existence of family land is a hindrance to rural development in general and to agricultural development in particular', and that, '[I]f development planners do not take steps to deal with the problem of family land, then the scandal of land scarcity in the midst of idle land will remain a feature of rural Jamaica' (1992:80).[23] I have already referred to continuing government attempts to undermine

[23]For a critique of Espeut's approach see Besson 1994e.

Jamaican Maroon common tenure. In Barbuda, where common tenure had been criticised by unsuccessful colonial agricultural developers since emancipation, there have recently been more successful attempts by the Antiguan-Barbudan government to erode traditional tenure in the context of tourism (Berleant-Schiller 1978, 1987). This has included the mining of Barbuda's pink-shell sand for removal to Antigua.[24] In 1994, I was told of a similar attitude towards family land in Virgin Gorda in the context of tourism.

My own research in Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean, combined with examination and synthesis of the regional literature, suggests alternative perspectives on all of the above dimensions of customary tenures.[25] First, their widespread distribution calls for regional analysis. A regional perspective on Caribbean societies and cultures has long been overlooked for, as Mintz has noted:

> 'It is a typically Caribbean fact that few students of the region even attempt to deal with more than one island, or one group of islands ... or, at best, one language-group ... Somewhat depressingly, each Caribbean-born scholar tends to concern himself [sic] almost exclusively with the island of his birth, thus fulfilling that fondest of European imperialist hopes for the region: that no Caribbean person ever develop a pan-Caribbean outlook ...' (1974:xii).

In the case of family land, these traditional tendencies have been reinforced by an aversion towards the development of a regional perspective on this kin-based tenurial system (Carnegie 1987; Crichlow 1994).[26] Secondly, Caribbean customary tenures rooted in kinship and community are not passive survivals from colonial and ancestral cultures, but represent dynamic culture-building by Caribbean peasantries themselves in response and resistance to colonialism, slavery, the plantation system, continued land monopoly through tourism, and Eurocentric legal codes.

Thirdly, this reinterpretation elucidates the dynamics of such customary tenures throughout the Caribbean. Unrestricted family land systems have been created at the heart of the plantation-peasant interface, and

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[24]During my visit to Barbuda in 1993, I was told of ongoing litigation regarding Antigua's control of Barbudan land.

[25]Cf. note 19 above.

[26]For example, in her critique of my approach, Crichlow focuses on family land in the 'Anglophone Caribbean' and on 'The Case of St. Lucia'. Apart from illustrating Mintz's points regarding a narrow focus on a specific territory and/or language-group, the fact that the small holders in the St. Lucian case study 'speak French Creole (patois) more easily than English' (Crichlow 1994:83) begs the question as to whether an 'anglophone' perspective is adequate. For a reply to Carnegie's critique see Besson 1987b; cf. notes 8 and 9 above.

where tourism reinforces land scarcity, to maximise freehold land rights and kinship lines among the descendants of legally landless and kinless chattel slaves. This is especially so in the Antilles, at the core of the region, including the free villages of Trelawny and the village of Aberdeen.[27] The African retention argument, which is the most plausible of the cultural survival theses, fails to account for the difference between West and Central African restricted unilineal landholding (e.g. Ashanti matrilineal land transmission) and these unrestricted cognatic Antillean systems (Besson 1984a:60-63, 1987b:106-08, 1992c:203, 212 n6).[28]

At the margins and frontiers of plantation society - in the Bahamas, the Caribbean Coast of Central America, the Guiana coastlands, and the Leeward Island of Barbuda (whose soil was unsuited to plantations) - the cognatic descent principle interweaves with more extensive common tenure, which likewise derives from Caribbean contexts. A similar pattern typifies the marginal Antillean reservations of the dispossessed Caribs in Dominica and St. Vincent, and the precipitous stronghold of the Jamaican Accompong Maroons.[29] Only in the mainland interiors of Suriname and French Guiana has there been sufficient land availability and the relative autonomy to retain or forge anew African-type matrilineal systems (cf. Besson 1994c, 1994d).

Fourthly, Caribbean customary tenures based on kinship and community should therefore be seen as adaptive systems of land tenure, use and

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[27] As in Jamaica, the bases of these unrestricted cognatic systems elsewhere in the Caribbean, especially in the Antilles, were the customary land rights among both male and female slaves. For evidence of such rights in the Danish West Indian island of St. John, in the British and French Windward Islands, and in the Leeward Islands see Olwig (1985:41, 49), Trouillot (1988:73-75), Marshall (1991:52-53, 60), Tomich (1991:80-81), and Gaspar (1992:146). The further consolidation of these customary rights among the slaves through burial of kin on such land is reported for Jamaica, St. John and Martinique.

[28] Thus in a discussion of Antillean subsistence cultivation, Berleant-Schiller and Pulsipher have noted that 'Family land is undoubtedly an Afro-American form of tenure that developed in the New World, as Besson (1984) [1984a] has ably argued, and is a characteristic part of the Antillean range of small plot tenure forms' (1986:16). Likewise, in his review of the Carnegie-Besson 'debate', instigated by Carnegie (1987), which I had attempted to defuse (Besson 1987b), Trouillot concludes that 'the only issue on which Carnegie and Besson really differ, in my view, is that of African retentions; my own position on this is closer to that of Besson' (1989:325 n2).

[29] Illustrations of the Caribbean derivation of such tenures are that: the Accompong Maroon commons derive from slave resistance and a colonial treaty (Kopytoff 1979; Besson 1994f); the Barbudan commons are based on a proto-peasant adaptation and the belief that the Codringtons willed the island to its inhabitants (Berleant-Schiller 1987:117; Besson 1987a:39 n5); and Carib reservations in St. Vincent derive from 'Grant Lands' from the colonial government in 1805 (Gullick 1976:252).

transmission, and as bases of sustainable development, in the face of continued land monopoly.[30] In some Caribbean societies, such as Jamaica and Barbados, the principles of family land have even recently transformed the legal code.[31] Such customary tenures are also repositories of hidden histories,[32] which need to be empowered and engendered.

The gender dimension in Caribbean peasant communities has not received the attention it deserves. In an attempt to redress this neglect and the traditional focus on the matrifocal household, Peter Wilson (1969, 1973) advanced the theory of 'reputation' and 'respectability'. He extrapolated, from the tiny island of Providencia, that men in anglophone Afro-Caribbean rural communities were the vanguard of a counter-culture of 'reputation', while women upheld colonial 'respectability' - historically rooted in the proximity of female slaves to the master class. As Trouillot (1992:26) noted, Wilson's analysis 'came close to becoming the master trope of Caribbean anthropology'. Wilson's influence has continued beyond Trouillot's review, as in Littlewood's distinguished monograph of the Earth People of Trinidad (1993).

In his analysis of reputation, Wilson included creole land tenure, kinship, religion (especially Rastafari) and oral culture, all of which he interpreted as male-oriented. However, in the peasant communities of west-central Jamaica, at the very heart of anglophone Caribbean society, women as well as men participate in all these dimensions of rural life and are therefore central to Caribbean culture-building and development

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[30]In the context of a less than rigorous portrayal of my views, Crichlow (1994:96 n17) states that I 'fault' the family land 'system's inefficiency in the use of "unrestricted cognatic descent" ', and aligns my views with those advanced e.g. by D.C.E. Mathurin (1967) - whose condemnation of family land I myself have earlier criticised. While 'not disputing the tendency towards "under-production" associated with family land' from a capitalist perspective (Besson 1984a:73), due to the unrestricted nature of descent and the symbolic aspects of family land tenure, I have repeatedly *defended* family land as an adaptive land use system and pointed out that it is land monopoly rather than the family land system *per se* that effectively inhibits agricultural development (see e.g. Besson 1984a:73, 1987a:37, 1988:48-50). For a related discussion of 'Galbraithian' and 'Zen' interpretations of 'under-production' see e.g. Sahlins 1972.

[31]This has included the abolition of primogeniture (1953, retrospective to 1937, in Jamaica), the 1976 Jamaican Status of Children Act and the 1981 Barbadian Family Law Act entitling 'illegitimate' children to intestate inheritance (Besson 1984a:76 n9, 1987b:111, 1988:55; Carnegie 1987:97 n3).

[32]Consistent with this thesis is the fact that the destruction of Carib society and culture by the colonial Conquest as related to me by the few surviving descendants of Caribs in Arima, Trinidad, in 1992, was portrayed through the theme of stolen land. Likewise, descendants of landless East Indian indentured plantation labourers in the Caroni area of Trinidad spoke to me, in 1992, of colonial trickery regarding betrayed promises of post-indenture land grants.

(Besson 1993).[33] I outline how kinship, ritual and oral tradition - which are all closely linked with land - and land rights themselves, are 'experienced and structured through gender' (Moore 1988:9) in these communities, which are located in a post-colonial class-race stratified anglophone Caribbean society.

In all seven villages the kinship and marriage systems are based on gender complementarity, reflected in bilateral kinship, unrestricted cognation, and conjugality based on both serial polygyny and serial polyandry. While the Maroons have additional tendancies towards endogamy and cousin-conjugality, these do not detract from the autonomy of either women or men. In the descent system, kinship articulates with land. Wilson argued that cognatic descent in Providencia was only an ideology, and that landholding was controlled by men. However, the unrestricted family land systems in the Jamaican non-Maroon communities incorporate women as well as men, and both genders create and transmit family land. In Accompong, common land rights, which form the wider context of the emergent cognatic corporations, are held and transmitted by women and men.

In ritual, men and women have more gender-specific roles. In Accompong, this is reflected in the ancestral Myal ritual, which charts a sacred landscape at the heart of common land. The ritual feast at the Kindah Grove is hedged by taboos and rules, ordering communication with the First-Time Maroons. Pigs and fowls are sacrificed and 'pot food' is cooked, especially by male members of a specific family line, and 'shop food' is tabooed. This feast represents the traditional Maroon economy, which was based on hunting wild pigs, and on domesticating provision grounds and yards. The gender and colour of the animals and ground provisions at the feast are also specified. Male pigs and fowls are sacrificed, and even the yams are male; while the hogs and cocks are black and white. This gender-specific and colour-coded food symbolises the male warriors on both sides of the Cockpit War, and the conflict in the colour-class colonial system encompassing the plantation owners and their rebel slaves. The sacrifices are made especially to the male warrior-ancestors, Colonel Cudjoe and his Captains, Quaco, Cuffee, Johnny and Accompong, who are said to be buried at two further sacred groves. The Maroons' ritual return from these groves to Kindah, armed with sticks and

[33]My 1993 article provides a comprehensive critical review of Wilson's thesis in the light of data from the Jamaican village of Martha Brae and from elsewhere in the island and the region.

battle-camouflaged with cocoon-vines,[34] further highlights the maleness of the warrior-heroes.

Complementing this male theme is the female focus of the Myal Dance or 'Play'. This is performed around the Kindah Tree and culminates in reputed spirit possession, by male warrior-heroes, of living female Maroons. Possession is enacted directly beneath the flourishing Kindah Tree, with its sign proclaiming 'We are Family'. The Myal Dance underlines the central role of women in reproducing the Leeward Maroon polity. The symbol of the Kindah Tree incorporates the generational links, and the complementary male and female principles, perpetuating the corporate Maroon community and embedded in its kinship and marriage system.

In the non-Maroon communities, while men are dominant in Rastafari (as is also the case in Accompong), women are the vanguard of the Revival-Zion rituals at the heart of these peasant cultures of resistance, though men play complementary roles (Besson 1994a). Since Revival is reflected in mortuary ritual, and in family land transmission and burial grounds, this further underlines the significance of women in landholding. Regarding the gender dimension in oral culture, I have documented in detail elsewhere the significance of women as well as men in the oral performance of Revival rituals in Martha Brae and in the competition for reputation in the factions that typify Revival Churches - both within that community, and between Martha Brae and Granville (Besson 1993).

Both genders also transmit the oral history that forms a central aspect of oral culture in the Jamaican villages, and there are ancestress-heroines as well as ancestor-heroes. In Alps, the central figure in oral tradition is male: Archibald Campbell (1813-1924), an emancipated slave from Alps estate. Many of the villagers claim cognatic descent from Archie Campbell, whose tomb-stone testifies that he lived to the age of one hundred and eleven (Besson 1984b:18). In Kettering, Granville, and Refuge, ancestress-heroines feature as prominently in oral history. I have already referred to the Kettering ancestress slave-child in the hog-meat gang. In Granville, 'Mother Lawrence', who was known to older contemporary villagers, is reputed to have been a slave-child at emancipation. Mother Lawrence's own mother is said to have been a slave on Merrywood estate, a participant in the emancipation celebrations, and one of Granville's ex-slave settlers who obtained half an acre of land from Knibb. This land has been transmitted through six descending generations (ibid.:12).

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[34]Accompong oral history states that the First-Time Maroons, in addition to using the cocoon-vine for camouflage, gathered the vine's giant bean-pods for food.

In Refuge, Elizabeth Bell-Merchant, nicknamed 'Queenie', her brother nicknamed 'Hard Time',[35] and their close male and female kin, all feature in the oral history of the Bell Old Family, one of the village's two central landholding family lines. Queenie's tomb can be identified in Refuge and many of the elderly villagers are her grandchildren. Oral tradition states that, at emancipation, Queenie's father cooked 'freedom dinner' on Oxford estate. His mother is said to have been one of the Oxford ex-slave settler's of Refuge, who acquired two small plots of land from Knibb, one of which remains as family land. Oral history further states that Queenie's paternal grandmother was one of three sisters brought on a slave ship from Africa to Jamaica, and separated on different plantations (Besson 1984b:14). The factual history of these reputed sisters, or shipmate fictive kin, is lost in time, but their symbolic role in the cultural history of Refuge will undoubtedly be transmitted - by women as well as men - for many years to come. Martha Brae's oral tradition also has its sacred personalities of both genders, who were ex-slave settlers of the village; and in my long-term fieldwork there, I was privileged to witness new heroes and heroines being created.

In Accompong, the central ancestral figure in oral history is Cudjoe, the First-Time Maroon who won the war and forged the peace. His reputed grave is at the sacred grove of Old Town, which is said to have been his military camp, on the outskirts of Accompong. Leeward Maroons claim, contentiously, that Nanny, the ritual Windward Maroon leader, who is generally thought to be interred in eastern Jamaica, is buried at Old Town near Cudjoe, who is said to have been Nanny's brother. This symbolic incorporation of the Windward Maroon heroine in Leeward Maroon land underlines the complementary female-male principles at the heart of Accompong society. For the reputed Cudjoe-Nanny brother-sister bond represents the sacred origin of the cognatic descent system, which perpetuates the corporate creole Maroon community. This is reinforced by the claim of common descent from Nanny by Accompong's largest cognatic family line.[36]

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[35]Wilson (1973) argued that titles and nicknames among men were a significant dimension of male-oriented reputation. However, as the example of 'Queenie' and her brother 'Hard Time' illustrates (as well as my earlier reference to Granville's 'Mother Lawrence'), titles and nicknames are used among both women and men in Jamaican villages (Besson 1993).

[36]As with burial practices, this oral history and its related ritual reflect ongoing creolisation. Kopytoff (1987) described the ascendance of the Christian God over the 'Town Master' of Accompong's traditional cosmology, from the 1930s to the 1970s. At that time, 'Town Massa' was Colonel Accompong and the weakened annual community ritual was a celebration of his birthday. By the late 1980s and 1990s, however, I found a renewed Myal ritual focusing on Cudjoe, whose

The role of Nanny as a ritual 'leadress' of the Jamaican 'runaway peasantries' (Mintz 1989:152) is one of many aspects of the hidden history of Caribbean female slave resistance, now being uncovered, that challenges the central basis of Wilson's thesis of reputation and respectability, namely, that slave women upheld the values of the master class (L. Mathurin 1975; Bush 1990; Dadzie 1990; Besson 1993). Slave women resisted slavery in many ways, some of which were common to both genders, others being peculiar to women. The former modes of slave resistance included withholding labour and malingering, plotting against the masters' property and persons, rebellion and marronage. Resistance more typical of women included controlling their own fertility, poisoning the masters' food, and the 'tongues of women'. The latter included answering back, complaining, ridicule and satire. Slave women's words not only took up their masters' time and disrupted work, but forced on them the consciousness of the humanity of the slave. These feminine modes of resistance were an outgrowth of the closer relationship of slave women to the masters as domestic slaves and concubines, a fact which Wilson (1973) himself identifies. In these contexts, rather than being willing mistresses to white men, slave women were often masters of the subtle form of slave resistance typified by the dissembling Quashee/Quasheba personality (Patterson 1967:174-81; Dadzie 1990:22, 33). Both slave women and men contributed to cultural resistance by creating creole languages, cosmologies, kinship systems, proto-peasant economies and communities; but women, as slave mothers, were the vanguard of such culture-building.

In the contemporary Caribbean, what more fitting female figure could have been found to further challenge Wilson's thesis than Mother Earth herself (Littlewood 1993). For the work of Mother Earth in Trinidad paradoxically represents both a feminist critique of the patriarchal Jamaican Rastafarian movement, and a variation on Caribbean Rastafari 'squatter peasantries' (Mintz 1989:147; Besson 1994b).[37]

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strengthened role had replaced the undermined Colonel Accompong (Besson 1994f).

[37]Littlewood states, in a footnote (1993:295 n42), that 'Jean Besson ... has pointed out that the respectability-reputation dichotomy undervalues the very real idea of resistance by Black women against slavery (e.g. Mathurin 1975); my own reading (and I think that of Peter Wilson) is that his bipolarity is to be read as polythetic: women are respectable, not as a fixed characteristic but relative to men'. However, my critique of Wilson (Besson 1993, and this article) questions Wilson's, and therefore Littlewood's, reading of respectability-reputation precisely as defined by Littlewood. Moreover, in the book in which my 1993 article appeared, four contributors of both genders criticised Wilson's thesis (Momsen 1993:6). For three further critiques of Wilson, see Bush (1990:1-3), Olwig (1990) and Trouillot (1992:26).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I briefly suggest the wider anthropological significance of the issues considered here, from the Caribbean frontier. These issues seem most relevant to the cross-cultural study of kinship, ecology and land; development, economy and dependency; the anthropology of gender; the anthropology of death and the regeneration of life; and the understanding of culture itself.

In the field of comparative kinship theory, the hidden histories of Caribbean peasant communities provide further evidence of unrestricted cognatic descent systems, which were once thought inoperable (Radcliffe-Brown 1950:43; Leach 1960:117) and are even now considered rare, examples generally being confined to Pacific and East African societies (Fox 1967; Caplan 1969; Hanson 1971). Moreover, the pioneering study of Jamaican family land by Edith Clarke (1953), a Jamaican anthropologist who had been a student of Malinowski at the L.S.E., was the first account of such an unrestricted system - predating Goodenough's (1955) rethinking of kinship systems.

Associated with the comparative study of cognatic and unilineal descent has been an unresolved controversy on kinship and ecology, which has likewise focused on Africa and the Pacific (e.g. Fox 1967:162; Allen 1971).[38] The Caribbean data, with unrestricted systems in the Antilles and matriliny in the Guianese interiors, are suggestive in relation to both the variable of land availability and the role of culture in shaping kin group structure. The Caribbean case also highlights paradoxical perceptions of land, as both a scarce economic good and a symbolic resource unlimited through its permanence and immortality (Besson 1987a, 1988). This theme finds parallels, for example, among Native Americans (Feher-Elston 1988), Australian Aborigines (Burt 1977), the Maori and Tikopia (Firth 1963:331), the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1971), and the Greek Mountain peasantry (du Boulay and Williams 1987), and would benefit from cross-cultural study. Caribbean peasant communities also reveal symbols of the regeneration of life in the contexts of death and mortuary ritual (cf. Bloch and Parry 1982). In Trelawny oral tradition, the immortality of the unrestricted family line and its corporate estate is contrasted with the mortality of individuals and humankind. While specific kin and trusteeships are referred to as 'expiring', 'dying', 'ending', family land is said to 'carry continuously, serving [ever-increasing] generations forever'

[38] Allen claimed to resolve the debate, but his conclusions supported the hypothesis that land scarcity generates less restricted descent systems. See Besson 1979 for a preliminary discussion of how the Caribbean data relate to the controversy.

(Besson 1988:44-45). The sacred fruit trees, which are part of the corporate estates of both family land and common land, are variations on this regeneration theme. When these corporate estates are further typified by generation or community burial grounds, as in Haiti, the Virgin Islands, Barbuda, Maroon and non-Maroon communities in Jamaica and the Guianas, and as was the custom among the proto-peasant slaves of Jamaica, St. John and Martinique, the recreation of kinship and community by chattel slaves and their descendants is most clearly symbolised.[39] The elaborate and extended mortuary ritual among peasants in Jamaica and elsewhere in the region, emphasising the placing of the dead in an active spirit world, also reinforces the regeneration theme.

In addition, the hidden histories of Caribbean peasantries, with their adaptive customary tenures in the oldest colonial sphere, further reveal the local wisdom of so-called Third World peoples that needs to be considered for sustainable development (Chambers 1983; Besson and Momsen 1987). The analysis of the symbolic aspects of family land constraining the maximisation of production from a capitalist point of view, also enhances comparative perspectives on so-called 'under-production' and on culturally 'embedded' economic systems, reinforcing an alternative non-Galbraithian view of 'affluence' (Dalton 1967; Sahlins 1972; Besson 1984a, 1987a). The existence of both kin-based and common Caribbean customary tenures, reflecting cultural resistance, likewise contributes to correcting the over-emphasis in dependency and world-systems theories on metropolitan-satellite and core-periphery relations (cf. Keesing 1981, chapter 21). For the creation of these tenures, at the Caribbean plantation-peasant interface, highlights the internal class dynamic at the very core of the 'periphery' and underlines the fact that independent thought and action by the powerless are only constrained, not destroyed, by dependency and hegemony.

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[39]On such burial practices see e.g. Larose (1975) on Haiti, Besson (1984b) for further information on Jamaica, Olwig (1985:41) on the Danish/American Virgin Island of St. John, Bilby (1989:147) on French Guiana, Tomich (1991:80) on Martinique, and Mintz and Price (1992:68-70) on Suriname. While I have also identified yard burial in the British Virgin Islands of Tortola and Virgin Gorda, I have been struck by its absence in Trinidad and Tobago, and in Barbados. Such absence of yard or community interment appears to be related to more intense land scarcity and to urbanisation. This hypothesis is supported by variations in interment patterns among Jamaican villages, described in this article and in Besson 1984b. The encroachment of tourism is likely to be a further factor affecting such practices. The significance of corporate burial grounds, linked to elaborate mortuary ritual, among Caribbean slaves and their descendants can be underlined by reference to Hertz's point (1960:76), quoted by Bloch and Parry (1982:4), that 'the death of a stranger, a slave, or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual' (cf. Besson 1984b:18).

With reference to the anthropology of gender, Moore has observed that feminist anthropology needs to confront more fully 'the question of how gender is constructed and experienced through race', in addition to the structuring of gender through colonialism, neo-imperialism and capitalism (1988:10). My critique of Wilson's thesis shows that Afro-Caribbean peasant women, as well as men, have been central to resistance, culture-building and development in the colonial and neo-imperial race-class stratified Caribbean Region (cf. Besson 1993).

In conclusion, empowering and engendering the hidden histories of Caribbean peasant communities contributes to discovering 'the nature of culture, understood as a continuous process of retention and renewal' (Trouillot 1992:30). Caribbean customary tenures have both retained and transformed aspects of European and African landholding, in the context of a wider creolisation process, which has been described by Mintz as 'the most remarkable drama of culture-building in the modern world' (1980:15). For example, family land has retained the underlying grammar of West and Central African kin-based unilineal landholding, but has transformed the organisation of kin groups and land transmission to resemble more closely the cognatic systems of Pacific and East African societies; a transformation rooted in Euro-American slave plantations.[40] The unrestricted family land system maximises land rights and kinship lines in the Caribbean context, in contrast to African unilineal descent and British primogeniture, and enables gender equality in kinship and landholding.[41] With circulatory transnational migration, enabled in part by unrestricted customary tenures that permit migrants to return, this creolisation process has continued. For example, the still hidden oral history of Caribbean migrants and their descendants in London tells of handfuls of earth from eternal family land being treasured as symbols of Black British identity.[42]

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[40]This analysis draws support from Mintz and Price's 'grammatical' model of African-American creolisation (1992).

[41]Fox (1967:31, 97) has pointed out that male control characterises matrilineal systems, and Caplan (1989/90:51) has noted that gender equality typifies Maffia Island cognatic landholding. Common tenure also enables gender complementarity.

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